

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for variable bit rate video coding on the basis of a predetermined average bit rate comprising:

a video coding means for coding input video with a predetermined quantization step size and providing coded data and a generated code bit count;

a quantization step size setting means for setting a reference quantization step size for each first image unit in correspondence to the average bit rate from the quantization step size provided to the video coding means and also the generated bit count provided therefrom; and

a quantization step size adjusting means for adjusting the quantization step size provided from the quantization step size setting means for each second image unit from the generated bit count provided from the video coding means and also from ~~a bit balance to an excess or a shortage of the average bit rate.~~

2. The apparatus for variable bit rate video coding according to claim 1, wherein:

the first image unit is a group of a plurality of picture frames.

3. The apparatus for variable bit rate video coding according to claim 1, wherein:

the second image unit is a group of a plurality of macro-blocks as divisions of one picture frame.

4. The apparatus for variable bit rate video coding according to claim 1, wherein:

the quantization step size setting means for setting the reference quantization step size for each first image unit computes an image unit complexity defined by the product of the average quantization step size over the preceding coded image and generated bit count, and also computes the reference quantization step size for each first image unit from the ratio between the first image unit complexity and the average bit rate.

5. The apparatus for variable bit rate video coding according to claim 1, wherein:

the quantization step size adjusting means for adjusting the quantization step size for each second image unit sets a minimum permissible quantization step size.

6. The apparatus for variable bit rate video coding according to claim 1, wherein:

the quantization step size adjusting means for adjusting the quantization step size for each second image unit sets a maximum excess of the average bit rate, sets a virtual buffer sized to the maximum excess from which codes are withdrawn at the average bit rate and adjusts the quantization step size for each second image unit by using the buffer occupancy in the virtual buffer and a utilizable buffer size obtained by subtracting the buffer

occupancy in the virtual buffer from the size thereof.

7. The apparatus for variable bit rate video coding according to claim 1, wherein:

the quantization step size setting means for setting the reference quantization step size for each second image unit includes a means for computing a first quantization step size by adjusting the quantization step size for each second image unit from the generated bit count provided from the video coding means and the ~~bit balance to~~ <sup>bit balance to</sup> ~~excess or shortage of~~ the average bit rate; and

it sets a maximum bit rate, computes a second quantization step size, which is set in the case of constant bit rate control on the basis of the maximum bit rate, from the quantization step size set in the quantization step size setting means and the generated bit count provided from the video coding means, and provides the greater one of the first and second quantization step sizes to the video coding means.

8. The apparatus for variable bit rate video coding according to claim 1, wherein:

the quantization step size setting means for setting the reference quantization step size for each first image unit computes a first image unit complexity for each first image unit, the first image unit complexity being defined by the product of the summation of generated bit count and the average quantization step size for each first image

unit, and determines the quantization step size of the first image unit from the first image unit complexity of the first image unit and the bit count per first image unit.

9. The apparatus for variable bit rate video coding according to claim 1, wherein:

the quantization step size setting means for setting the reference quantization step size for each first image unit computes the first image unit complexity for each first image unit from the summation of the generated bit count and the average quantization step size for each first image unit, and determines the quantization step size of the first image unit from the average first image unit complexity for the first image unit over the preceding coded image, the average first image unit complexity of the immediately preceding first image unit or a plurality of first image unit including the immediately preceding first image unit and the bit rate per first image unit.

10. The apparatus for variable bit rate coding video data according to claim 1, wherein:

the quantization step size adjusting means for adjusting the quantization step size for each second image unit preliminarily sets a threshold for quantization step size,

when the excess or shortage of the average bit rate is not excessive, the reference quantization step size set for each first image unit is compared with the threshold

for quantization step size, for providing the quantization step size without any adjustment when the reference quantization step size is not exceeding the threshold quantization step size, and adjusting the quantization step size according to the excess or shortage of the average bit rate and selectively providing the greater one of the adjusted quantization step size and the threshold for quantization step size, and when the excess or shortage of the average bit rate is excessive, the quantization step size is adjusted according to the ~~bit balance to~~ <sup>bit balance to</sup> excess or shortage of the average bit rate, the adjusted quantization step size being provided as the quantization step size for each second image unit.

11. A method of variable bit rate coding video data on the basis of a predetermined average bit rate comprising:

a video coding step of coding input video with a predetermined quantization step size and providing coded data and a generated code bit count;

a quantization step size setting step of setting a reference quantization step size for each first image unit in correspondence to the average bit rate from the quantization step size provided to the video coding step and also the generated code bit count provided therefrom; and

a quantization step size adjusting means for

adjusting the quantization step size provided from the quantization step size setting means for each second image unit from the generated code bit count provided from the video coding step and also from an excess or a shortage of the average bit rate.

12. The method of variable bit rate coding video data according to claim 11, wherein:

the first image unit is a group of a plurality of picture frames.

13. The method of variable bit rate coding video data according to claim 11, wherein:

the second image is a group of a plurality of macro-blocks as divisions of one picture frame.

14. The method of variable bit rate coding video data according to claim 11, wherein:

in the quantization step size setting step of setting the reference quantization step size for each first image unit, a first image unit complexity is computed, which is defined by the product of the average quantization step size and generated code bit rate over the preceding coded image, and also the reference quantization step size for each first image unit is computed from the ratio between the first image unit complexity and the average bit rate.

15. The method of variable bit rate coding video data according to claim 11, wherein:

in the quantization step size adjusting step of adjusting the quantization step size for each second image unit, a minimum permissible quantization step size is set.

16. The method of variable bit state coding video data according to claim 11, wherein:

in the quantization step size adjusting step of adjusting the quantization step size for each second image unit, a maximum excess of the average bit rate is set, a virtual buffer sized to the maximum excess is set for withdrawing codes at the average code bit, and the quantization step size is adjusted for each second image unit by using the occupation content in the virtual buffer and a utilizable code bit count obtained by subtracting the occupation content in the virtual buffer from the size thereof.

17. The method of variable bit rate coding video data according to claims 11, wherein:

the quantization step size setting step of setting the reference quantization step size for each second image unit includes a step of computing a first quantization step size by adjusting the quantization step size for each second image unit from the generated code bit count provided from the video coding step and the excess or shortage of the average bit rate; and

in the computing step, a maximum bit rate is set, a second quantization step size is computed, which is set in the case of fixed bit rate control on the basis of the maximum bit rate, from the quantized width set in the quantization step size setting step and the generated code bit count provided from the video coding step, and the greater one of the first and second quantization step sizes is provided to the video coding step.

18. The method of variable bit rate coding video according to claim 11, wherein:

in the quantization step size setting means for setting the reference quantization step size for each first image unit, a first image unit complexity is computed for each first image unit, the first image unit being defined by the product of the summation of generated code bit rate and the average quantization step size for each first image unit, and the quantization step size of the first image is determined from the first image unit complexity of the first image unit and the bit rate per first image unit.

19. The method of variable bit rate coding video according to claims 11, wherein:

in the quantization step size setting means for setting the reference quantization step size for each first image unit, the first image unit complexity is computed for each first image unit from the summation of

the generated code bit count and the average quantization step size for each first image unit, and the quantization step size of the first image unit is determined from the average first image unit complexity for the first image unit over the preceding coded image, the average first image unit complexity of the immediately preceding first image unit or a plurality of first image unit including the immediately preceding first image unit and the bit rate per first image unit.

20. The method of variable bit rate coding video coding according to claims 11, wherein:

in the quantization step size adjusting means of adjusting the quantization step size for each second image unit, a threshold quantization step size is preliminarily set, when the access or shortage of the average bit count is not excessive, the reference quantization step size set for each first image unit is compared with the threshold quantization step size, for

providing the quantization step size without any adjustment when the reference quantization step size is not exceeding the excess or shortage of the average bit rate, and

adjusting the quantization step size according to the excess or shortage of the average bit count and selectively providing the greater one of the adjusted quantization step size and the threshold quantization step size, and

when the excess or shortage of the average bit count is excessive, the quantization step size is adjusted according to the excess or shortage of the average bit count, the adjusted quantizing being provided as the quantizing for each second image unit.

21. A method of variable bit rate coding video data on the basis of a predetermined average bit rate wherein quantization step size is set such as to hold a constant coded image quality level over a plurality of groups of picture images and the quantization step size is adjusted from the excess or shortage of the actual generated code bit rate with respect to the average bit rate with reference to the quantization step size that has been set as above.